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THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF US-ARAB MILITARY RELATIONS

by

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A paper submitted to the Faculty of the Naval War College in partial satisfaction of the requirements of the Department of Management.

The contents of this paper reflect my own personal views and are not necessarily endorsed by the Naval War College or the Department of the Navy.

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## Abstract of

### THE CULTURAL IMPACT OF US-ARAB MILITARY RELATIONS

This study examines the potential cultural impact which US-Arab behavioral differences can have on military relations. US-Arab cultural differences are first explored through a detailed look at three major factors influencing Arab behavior: group dynamics, the emotional impact of language and idealism. A case history of the Soviet Union's advisory mission in Egypt is depicted as a classic example of how the failure to deal effectively with the cultural aspects of a military program can lead to its failure. The impact of Arab cultural motivations on their own military forces are discussed using two examples considered to represent the opposite ends of the military spectrum, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. The Egyptian and Saudi Arabian forces are shown in contrast through their differing approach to the military. The Egyptian army is depicted as a force for social change, and the Saudi military is described as a tribally oriented conservative organization dedicated to maintaining the status quo. Effective ways to deal with US-Arab cultural differences are discussed, and US advisory experience and training provide some useful insight in this area. Some suggestions are made for decision makers when dealing with the Arab military such as modifying the US problem solving technique. The direct approach method is analyzed against the indirect Arab approach. The influence of personality, language and patience is also explored.

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION.

This is a study of the cultural implications of US-Arab military operations in the Arab world. The Middle East has assumed vital strategic importance to the US and most military planners have been concentrating on the problems of how to get there, the need for bases, water supply, lines of communication and mechanization of our forces. However, there has been little if any examination of the likely cultural impact between US and Arab Armed Forces. An examination of history will show that cultural relationship problems have plagued every Western Army to venture into the Arab world since Napoleon's landing at Alexandria in 1798. Culture should not be neglected in the Middle East.

Because there are so many interpretations of the word culture, it may be useful to provide an explanation of exactly how it will be used in this study. In Krober and Kluckhorn's scholarly review, culture is defined as:

The sum total of ideas - language, religion, beliefs, customs, artistic norms, emotional responses and patterns of habitual behavior which the members of that society have acquired as a legacy from the past and which is shared to a greater or lesser degree.<sup>1</sup>

Other behavioral scientists such as Ina Corrine Brown refer to culture as "the accepted and patterned ways of behavior of a given people."<sup>2</sup> Culture has many definitions, most of which include behavior, language and religion. As used in this study, culture is defined as a system of values and behavior based on religion, nationality, background and language.

Arab is another word which must be defined here.

An Arab, in the context of this study, refers to a native born person of the Middle East region who speaks Arabic as a native tongue and whose religion is Islam.

Recent events highlight the importance of the potential impact of US-Arab cultural relations. There has been a significant US military force especially created to operate in the Middle East, the Rapid Joint Deployment Force, which already has sent Army and Air Force Units to Egypt on combined training missions. In the fall of 1980 an Army operation called Bright Star, airlifted 911 men from the 101st Airborne Division to Cairo-West Airbase. Prior to taking off for Egypt, the Commander briefed his men that Egyptian vendors would "act like academy award winners," that they were "going to get ripped off," and not to be startled if they saw "Egyptian men holding hands in public."<sup>3</sup> The briefing probably served its purpose, but more importantly it reflected our stilted perception of Arab culture.

The United States has so much going on, and so much at stake in the Middle East that we cannot afford to be insensitive to their culture. Further, the Arab-Israeli problem continues without any end in sight. The Lebanese crisis goes on and the Palestinians in that country remain a major problem for both the Israelis and Lebanese Christians. It certainly seems that an understanding of the area's culture would enhance more rational even-handed thinking about the problems between Arabs and Israelis. Also the United States has recently been increasing its

economic and political ties with Arab states. Military relationships, the Arab-Israeli conflict and increased business activity seem to all call for a greater understanding of this strategic area. It is worth noting that one of the most eloquent calls for a study of Arab cultural implications has been made by the American University of Beirut scholar,

Dr. Zeine N. Zein:

Hence, for a correct understanding and appraisal of the Arab Near East, today, a study of Islam, Muslim institutions, and Muslim psychology is imperative. Lacking this basic inquiry, other studies will touch only the surface and not the heart of the matter. Those who see nothing in the Arab Near East but its geography and geopolitics, its overland commercial routes, its principal airfields, its strategic location and its rich oil fields are making a grievous error. Failure to comprehend the human element in this area has been one of the major causes of the failure of the West in the Arab Near East. To evaluate correctly the situation in this part of the world, one must understand the source from which spring the motives and actions of the vast majority of its inhabitants; namely, the religion of Islam; without this it will be impossible to grasp the deeper issues at stake. Many political, economic, and social problems in this part of the world are interwoven with religion. The force of Islam is still much greater than the force of politico-secular nationalism. This basic truth should neither be ignored nor underestimated.<sup>4</sup>

The substance of this study is contained in the following four chapters: Chapter II will discuss Arab culture and examine how it differs from ours. Next, Chapter III will proceed to examine the Egyptian-Soviet advisory relationship as a specific example of how to culturally alienate an Arab state. In Chapter IV, two Arab militaries will be culturally contrasted to show the broad spectrum of culture underlying Arab nations themselves. Finally, the study will explain in Chapter V how best to deal with the Arabs from a cultural standpoint in the hope that we can profit from past experience.

## CHAPTER II

### CHARACTERISTICS OF ARAB CULTURE

#### ARAB CULTURE

The Arabs are a proud and sensitive people whose culture is mainly derived from three factors: kinship, language and Islam.<sup>1</sup> No adequate understanding of Arab culture is possible without first considering these three elements of their culture. As pointed out previously, culture provides a basis for one's behavior as well as a basis for interpreting others. The Arab's cultural system has proven functionally useful in the Middle East area because it provides the Arab with an accepted behavior pattern which can be used in daily life. These accepted behavioral patterns have been developed over centuries through the Arab's social response to various stimuli such as images of human nature, man's dealing with good and evil, idealistic images of correct personal behavior, concepts of political relationships and an Arab's accepted view of the world as basically threatening. The Arab response to these various stimuli produced cultural attitudes which eventually developed into Arab behavioral characteristics. This chapter will be devoted to the major factors influencing Arab culture: kinship, language and Islam.<sup>1</sup> The kinship characteristic will include group dynamics as built around the family. Language will be discussed as it affects emotional tenor. Islam will be depicted as an expression of the idealism of the Arab. Some areas of dominant Arab concern such as continuation of the close knit family, loss of Arab identity, the corruption of youth and the return to Islamic fundamentalism also will be examined.

## MAJOR FACTORS OF ARAB BEHAVIOR

The Family. The first major factor overshadowing all other societal demands of an Arab is that of family and kin. An Arab's concept of the world has occasionally been described as a series of seven concentric circles with the individual Arab at the center. He is surrounded by the circle of his immediate family, and outside that circle is his extended family or tribe. Next is his immediate geographic region and then his country. Outside of his country ring is the rest of the Arab world; then the rest of the Muslim world, the "Dar al Islam." Outside this ring is the rest of the world viewed by the Arab as the "Dar al Harb" or war area.<sup>2</sup>

A means of reinforcing familial relationships is through marriage. Arab marriage patterns are usually within their own family group with the most desired partners being cousins.<sup>3</sup> One of the long term consequences of this custom has been the development of a highly organized social structure among a closely knit family. Even among extended family members, the goals of family well being and honor are principal considerations.

The style of Arab parenthood is responsible for some behavioral traits according to the noted arabist, Dr. Raphael Patai, who argues that children cannot establish a predictable pattern between love and discipline.<sup>4</sup> This fluctuation between a loving mother and stern disciplinarian father can add to the complexity of growing up and can foster schizoid personality traits. Many arabists have commented on the rapid change of Arab emotions and reasoning. Colonel T. E. Lawrence spoke of this when he said that the Arabs view "everything black or white" with no middle ground.<sup>5</sup> This roller coaster type behavior is often demonstrated by cool

self-control at times, followed by uncontrolled outbursts of emotion.. This also illustrates the ease with which a crowd can become violent in the Arab world. No doubt tightly controlled families, closeness of living space and intense family pressures contribute to another Arab behavioral trait stemming from group dynamics. That trait is conflict.

#### CONFLICT

Arab behavior seems to have a propensity for conflict. Some reasons for this may again lie with the family where competitiveness is instilled at an early age and life generally exists under some form of pressure. An old Arab saying aptly describes the competitive, hostile spirit bred into Arab children,

"I against my brother, my brother and I against our cousins, my brother, my cousins and I against the world."<sup>6</sup>

Another probable cause for this intense conflict is Arab history itself, which has been dominated by warfare, domestic upheaval and struggles against invasions from outside the Arab world. The legacy of t... history is a basic, almost visceral mistrust of any outside group, or more specifically, any western state whose true ultimate intentions cannot readily be determined.

There are many other internal sources of conflict which have existed among the Arabs themselves for centuries. Some of these long-standing sources of conflict are: strategic conflicts, economic rivalries, ideological wars, tribal and religious disagreements and just plain cultural differences.<sup>7</sup> For example, there has been strategic rivalry between the Fertile Crescent and Egypt since ancient times. More recently strategic struggles have taken place over the Lebanon, the White Nile, the Red Sea and

the Arabian Gulf (more commonly referred to as the Persian Gulf). Also economically, the conflict over scarce resources now continues with oil and water rights taking the place of food and caravan routes. Today's ideological conflicts place the Steadfastness Front (Iraq, Libya, Syria and Algeria) against the conservatives as well as Iraqi Baathi's against Syrian Baathi's. Various "isms" such as Nasserism, Progressivism and Socialism, all typify the general ideological fragmentation of the Arab population and add to the spectrum of conflict. In the area of tribal and religious conflict, numerous rivalries predate recorded history. Consider that the early Islamic wars after the death of the Prophet brought on the Sunni-Shiite tensions which remain today in many areas such as Iran-Iraq, Syria and Lebanon. Viewed from this perspective, even the Christian-Muslim struggle in Lebanon appears to continue this historic trend of religious conflict. Historically, dynastic rivalry such as between the House of Saud and the Hashemite Kingdom has always been a large factor in Arab life. Also, there is the age old struggle between the desert bedouin and the townsman such as was rekindled in the intense 1970 conflict between the Jordanian bedouin and the Palestinian guerrilla in Jordan.

In dealing with Arabs, consideration must always be given to their patterned behavior of conflict. Especially in military affairs, the undercurrents of traditional conflict can limit the number of options available to a decision maker and limit his overall capability to correct a problem. Historically, this has been evident in the difficulty in maintaining Middle Eastern alliances. Suspicion of a traditional enemy's territorial

ambitions die hard, and international troop movements to shore up Arab allies are nearly impossible because of the fear that the visiting soldiers may be used against the host government. Likewise new pacts or military agreements with foreign powers are initially viewed negatively by an Arab state's neighbors because of the potential impact on inter-Arab affairs as well as a xenophobic fear of the West. Experience has shown that it is fairly unusual for an Arab state to enter into an agreement with an outside power without first consulting with its neighbors to allay their fears and forestall conflict.

Because conflict appears to be such a normal behavioral pattern in Arab group dynamics at the individual, group or even international level, it seems reasonable that the Arabs would have developed a traditional means of settling the differences. Over the centuries they have developed a ritualized form of mediation for dealing with conflict. A study of Arab history, and even present day events, points out that the traditional methods of mediation have been used time and time again. In large scale hostilities the mediation may at times seem ineffective to a Westerner, but it does serve to interrupt the fighting, let cooler heads prevail and give each side an honorable way out of the quarrel.<sup>8</sup> The methodology is essentially the same for a small personal quarrel or a war; it is arranged around a mediator who plays a specific role. The mediator or wasit is usually a man (or country) of personality, status, respect, wealth and influence with both sides. Picking or persuading the perfect mediator is obviously the sine qua non of successfully mediating a conflict. Traditionally it has been the rule that a mediator meets with much greater success if he is a man of prestige.

Custom requires that the steps in mediation follow a specific pattern: separate the fighting parties, make it physically impossible to continue the fighting, arrange a solution which will not cause a loss of face or honor to either side and then guarantee the restitution or final agreement. There are innumerable examples of conflict mediation in the Arab world from the personal to the international level. They are all ritualized and it appears that the major difficulty is getting the right mediator at the beginning.

#### CROWD MENTALITY

In the Arab world there is little stigma placed on the loss of self control in outbursts of emotion. This is a particularly important factor in group dynamics and it is demonstrated frequently by the way in which a crowd can suddenly give way to outbursts of anger and violence. Reasons given for this generally lead back to the Arab family - closeness, competitiveness and conflict. Also, the Arab means of vocal expression where they routinely express themselves is through shouting accompanied by signs of anger at the market, in correcting children, at funerals, etc.<sup>9</sup> Opportunities for emotional outpourings are frequent in an Arab's daily life and in a crowd situation, these emotions are very likely to break loose. An Arab crowd is high strung emotionally and violent crowds are frequent during periods of crisis. Deaths of national leaders, political rallies, anti-western rallies, etc., all qualify as reasons for Arab disorders.

There can even be less serious reasons, for example in Lebanon the author witnessed a severe riot in 1978 over the outcome of a beauty contest.

#### EMOTIONAL IMPACT OF THE ARABIC LANGUAGE

Arab Emotions and Hyperbole. The second major factor influencing Arab culture is language. The Arabs place a high value on the Arabic language, and it exerts an important psychological influence over their behavior. Arabic scholars have long known that even though most languages are influenced by the culture and people who speak it, Arabic has an influence over the psychology and culture of the people who use it.<sup>10</sup>

"English cannot even challenge Arabic for its sheer power and ability to impact on the emotions of the listener."<sup>11</sup>

The Arab-American historian P.K. Hitti, agrees that "no people in the world has such enthusiastic admiration for literary expression and is so moved by the word, spoken or written.<sup>12</sup> Not only are the listeners moved, but Arabic has an impact on speakers as well. Orators are prone to be carried away in verbal exaggeration when speaking before an audience.

This exaggeration is called mubalaghah in Arabic, but it is not considered to be exaggeration in a derogatory sense, but rather it is considered more as a term of oratorical eloquence.

A key point in understanding Arab statements is that their mentality finds nothing wrong with eloquent exaggeration because they feel that words really shouldn't be taken at all times at their face value. The Arab Scholar, Edward Atiyah, supports this by his comment that Arabs are swayed "more by ideas than by facts."<sup>13</sup> The mastery of a rich rhythmic vocabulary

with lyrical phrases is a highly valued skill which is often attained even by illiterates.

Perhaps it is not enough to say that the Arabs merely value their language, for it is a most beloved possession. One reason for this love affair with Arabic is the melodious pleasure derived from hearing and saying certain words and patterns of words from its rich literary heritage. Probably the most important underlying reason for their love of Arabic is the Qur'an and the belief that this holy book, set forth in Arabic, is man's highest linguistic achievement.<sup>14</sup>

Understanding the Arab's love of Arabic makes it easier to comprehend that speakers are admired, not so much for what they say, but how they say it. For example, President Nasser could hold crowds spellbound for hours with his eloquence. After the Six Day War in fact, crowds of Arabs would gather around every village radio and television set to admire and applaud the Rais (President's) marathon speeches because of their elaborate flowing classical style. Even today Nasser's speeches remain as a prime example of the orator's craft, and students of Arabic at the Foreign Service Institute in Washington, D.C. continue to study them.<sup>15</sup>

One should not underestimate the behavioral impact of Arabic. Its psychological influence lies in three main areas: general vagueness of thought; overemphasis on words at the expense of their meanings and stereotyped emotional vocal responses to

specific situations.<sup>16</sup> The most difficult of these behavioral influences for Americans to understand is overemphasis and exaggeration. There are numerous examples of how exaggeration and emphatic overemphasis can lead Arab speakers down the path to outlandish public statements. For example, Patai tells the amusing story of the A-bomb made by a Syrian tinsmith: "On the eve of the 1948 Israeli War of Independence, Musa Alami, a well known Palestinian leader was attempting to gain support in various Arab capitals. In Damascus the President of Syria told him: "I am happy to tell you that our Army and its equipment are of the highest order and we'll be able to deal with a few Jews; and I can tell you in confidence that we even have an atomic bomb... yes it was made locally; we fortunately found a clever fellow, a tinsmith..."<sup>17</sup> President Sadat in a similar story of exaggeration tells of a visit of the Egyptian War Minister, Shamus Badran, to Moscow prior to the 1973 War. In the Kremlin Badran was asked what Egypt would do if the US Sixth Fleet intervened in the fighting. He announced without hesitation:

"We have a weapon that can deal a lethal blow." He had in mind the rocket carrier TU-16 Bomber which, loaded with its rockets, can go no faster than 310 mph, that is half the speed of a civilian Boeing. The joke amused them a great deal in the Kremlin, just as it amused us in Egypt.<sup>18</sup>

Most Arabic scholars feel that this mubalagha as well as tawkid (assertion) is almost a linguistic game played between speaker and listener. In his article on the influence of language on Arab psychology, the Arab scholar, Dr. Shouby, comments on mubalagha and tawkid, and his words are worth remembering:

"Arabs are forced to over-assert and exaggerate in almost all types of communications, as otherwise they stand a good chance of being gravely misunderstood. If an Arab says exactly what he means without the expected exaggeration, other Arabs may think that he means the opposite. This fact leads to misunderstandings on the part of non-Arabs who do not realize that the Arab is merely following a linguistic tradition.<sup>19</sup>

Shouby's comments emphasize the important concept that the average Arab uses exaggeration and overemphasis without even being aware that he is doing it. It is very difficult for an Arab to make a simple statement of fact. For this reason it usually pays to be cautious about exact translations of Arabic statements.

There may also be a bit of wish fulfillment in Arab exaggeration. They at times can have such a strong desire for an event to take place that they make a statement confusing the desired action with an accomplished fact. The general vagueness of thought and ambiguous structure of the Arabic language itself also contributes to this tendency to exaggerate and substitute words for action. For example, in sentences expressing wishes such as Wallahi la fa' altu which can be literally translated "By Allah, I did not do (it)," actually means "By Allah, I shall not do (it)." Another example is the word phrase, badrab which literally translates "I want to beat," but actually means "I shall beat." This fusion between desired actions and accomplished facts should be considered when listening to the emphatic statements of Arabs. It is obvious that time and action can have very subtle connotations in the translation of Arabic. Be wary.

## ISLAM

Arab idealism as expressed through Islam is a dominant cultural feature; the Islamic religion has always been a source of law and sociopolitical ideology.<sup>20</sup> From past to present, Arab philosophers have attempted to rationalize and legitimatize their ideals in terms compatible with Islamic idealism. The Islamic scholar, W. Cantwell Smith, has aptly described the Muslim's almost quixotic loyalty to the Islamic ideal as "a passionate but rational pursuit of that social justice that was once the dominant note of the faith and the dominant goal of its forms and institutions."<sup>21</sup> The idealism of Islam can be viewed as the ultimate guidance system for Arab behavior; it provides an all encompassing code of interpersonal relations. This code is embodied in the Shari'a which is a sacred body of Islamic law derived from the Qur'an. The Shari'a dominates all aspects of life and society in a way that is almost incomprehensible to an American. Some might argue that Islam is another means developed by Arab culture as a way to cope with and forestall the Arab's basic behavioral tendency towards conflict. Nonetheless, Islam is interwoven with Arab culture and its rules give a distinctive pattern to the Arab's daily life. Various verses of the Qur'an symbolize this acceptance by man of God's pattern. The Arab doesn't always live in a tight patterned world of justice and order, but as Smith says, he tries.<sup>22</sup>

It is this mixture of Islam and Arabism which provides an interesting combination of many prized elements of Arab culture. Pride and sensitivity, the ideal of manly virtue, the Arabic language, dignity, and the all important concept of honor are

all interwoven between Islam and Arabism. It is these valued elements or ideals which hold Arab society together. Consider that Arab society, like most societies, has common loyalties and traditions. Yet, in the Muslim world there is an additional system based on personal conviction with a carefully worked out system of values and beliefs based on Islam as the superb ideal. In a very real sense the Arab community is a living example of a religious ideal with "religious" being used in a truly personal sense.

#### THE BEDOUIN

Even though the nomadic bedouins make up a very small portion of the Arab population they have always been considered the "Arabs par excellence" and the repository of traditional Arab culture and values.<sup>23</sup> The bedouin ethic is thought to be the ideal moral code by most Arabs. The code of the bedouin is simple. It is essentially based on courage, hospitality, honor, generosity and self-respect. These simple but admirable virtues make up the basic code of the desert which is admired as an ideal by all Arabs. In fact, tracing one's lineage to bedouin stock has been considered a claim to social status for most Arab leaders. For example, in Iraq former President Kassem and present President Saddam Hussein have traced their geneology to desert tribes.<sup>24</sup> Some motivation for this could be attributed to a form of nostalgia for a better time, when life was simpler and more manageable, such as with the nomadic bedouins. It must be emphasized here that most bedouin traits are derived from honor, dignity and self-respect, and an

American would heed well the importance of these to an Arab. Honor (sharaf) according to some anthropologists was valued since early times because it was conducive to group cohesion and survival.<sup>25</sup> It follows from the fact that shameful behavior or cowardice would weaken the group and endanger society. Arabs are extremely sensitive to any slight to their honor, and it follows that any slight to a man's honor must be revenged. There are even times when a personal incident can bring dishonor on an entire family, such as a scandal involving a female family member's sexual honor. Other instances can involve the blood feud. Occasionally during 1968, Israeli Druze border guards would injure Palestinian commandos in the Jordan Valley area. The Palestinian's family was then honor bound to take revenge against the Druze or his family unless a conciliation involving blood money could be arranged.<sup>26</sup> Honor can even be the collective property of as large a group as an entire army. For example the relaxed, conciliatory approach taken by King Hussein towards the gradual takeover of the country by Palestinian commandos in 1970 angered his Bedouin Army. The King was trying to avoid a fight until a solution could be worked out. But this situation, along with strident Palestinian actions, caused the Jordanian Army to feel insulted and to have lost face (more specifically in Arabic "to blacken their face"). Symbolically, some armored units tied brassieres to their vehicle antennas to express their collective dishonor and the feeling that Hussein had made them into women.<sup>27</sup>

A key point to consider is that right or wrong, in all matters involving honor, an Arab must behave with dignity and self-respect or lose face (*wujah*). It is important in any confrontation to leave the Arab a way to withdraw or back down without losing face. Nasser's dispute with Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles over Aswan in 1956, served to illustrate this. What began as a reappraisal of our foreign aid program became personalized into a matter of national honor. Because dignity, self-respect and honor are so vulnerable to external actions, the Arab is extremely heedful of being slighted and may often see personal insult in comments or deeds which carry no such intentions. Even long-time residents of the Middle East, such as Glubb Pasha, can fall prey to such unintended slights. The day before a ceremonial review of the Arab Legion was to take place, Glubb said to his orderly: "I don't really want you tomorrow, you can have the day off and take your wife to the review, if you like." Whereupon the deeply insulted orderly replied: "So you think I am the kind of person to sit with women?"<sup>28</sup>

Any discussion of the role of bedouin traits in Arab ideals would not be complete without mentioning hospitality and generosity which go hand in hand. Providing hospitality is a matter of both face and honor to an Arab. To be inhospitable is shameful. During the hospitality, the host is always expected to be generous and Arabs often entertain lavishly. It is interesting to note that the Arab word for generosity, karim, also means distinguished, noble-minded, noble-hearted, honorable and respectable. This gives some idea of the esteem with which generosity is valued.<sup>29</sup>

## PAN ARABISM

Pan Arabism means one Arab nation with all Arabs as brothers. This is a part of Arab consciousness as well as an important Arab ideal. Indeed, this feeling is enhanced by the strong religious, social and economic ties uniting most Arabs. This is logical because among all Arabs there are similar attitudes toward life, language and history. The Islamic religion itself also gives a further spiritual sense of commonality.

Pan Arabism as an ideal has been a unifying force in the Arab's struggle for independence, first from the Turks, and in recent times, from the West. Arabs can become very emotional about Pan Arabism, and a strong feeling of solidarity with Arabs in other countries has become a potent political consideration. These feelings of Arab solidarity have also been given expression in the Arab League which was founded to promote inter-Arab cooperation. It is in these expressions of brotherhood that Pan Arabic ideals actually can cause political motives to disappear and internal differences to be smoothed over in the emotional climate of Arab unity. It must be understood, however, that although Pan Arabism is an emotional state of mind which is very important to Arabs, the Arab people are still a long way from becoming one nation.

### AREAS OF DOMINANT ARAB CONCERN

Even a brief discussion of Arab behavior would be incomplete without some mention of the primary cultural concerns of the Arab world. These concerns encompass the family, Islam, the danger of a loss of Arab identity and the corruption and disintegration of traditional Arab society. To an Arab the family is sacrosanct and there will be strong individual as well as official governmental resistance to even minor attempts to weaken or attack the family framework.

Although the Arab considers the family as the basis of Arab society, he views Islam as the completed solid structure of society. Because Islam is essentially a system of life, Arabs are genuinely concerned over any indication that their religion is in danger. In October 1980, Colonel Quadhahafi of Libya charged that the US AWAC's aircraft had violated sacred airspace above the holy cities of Mecca and Medina and that the AWAC's electronics had deliberately ruined a television transmission of the celebration of a traditional Muslim holy day. This charge by Quadhahafi enraged the Saudis who said that he was "casting doubts at the practice by Muslims of their religious rites. This we cannot tolerate or be silent about." Two days later they added "you (Quadhahafi) believed you can harm Islam and slander it and ridicule the honorable traditions of the Prophet."<sup>30</sup> Charge and counter charge continued, finally resulting in a break in diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Another significant concern is the danger of the loss of Arab identity. The proud Arab sees and intimately feels the daily assault of modern technology, new social mores and western culture. The long haul diesel truck is replacing the camel caravan, the quick snack shop is replacing the coffee shop and western movies and music are frequently preferred by Arab youth. Infringement on this identity as an Arab may cause a nostalgic quest for the good old days, and even in some cases, a reactionary backlash against symbols of progressivism. Even in the US, one of the universal responses to the loss of cultural identity is to keep ethnic symbology strong. Folk art, music, and poetry are frequently sponsored by cultural groups seeking to keep alive the arts of the Arab. Another area where there is a challenge to traditional Arab identity is with the elite class, and especially the western trained technocrats. These bilingual individuals frequently suffer an ethnic identity crisis, not belonging to the West, yet not able to fully return to basic Arab life.<sup>31</sup>

The most dramatic response to the Arab identity crisis is presently being made by the Islamic fundamentalists. These fundamentalists such as seen among the muhajidiin of Iran, the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Syria, and Afghan freedom fighters signify a change in the political behavior of Muslims. According to Professor Leonard Binder of the University of Chicago, these fundamentalists are seeking cultural authentication through domination of the political scene.<sup>32</sup>

One of the most bitter and frequent complaints against the West is that it is attempting to corrupt Arab society. Some Arabs feel that even simple, innocuous entertainment such as Western films and music are counter to the general morality of the Arab world. Relaxed standards of dress, women's liberation, alcohol and disco are all considered by some Arabs to be an affront to Islamic purity. Not only do Arabs see tangible evidence that individuals are falling prey to Western influence, but they frequently sense that the fundamental values of the population in general are being corrupted.<sup>33</sup>

The disintegration of traditional Arab society, along with loss of identity and outside corruption, is another paramount concern of the Arab. Huge segments of the population simply cannot cope with the social and political changes taking place. No one really knows where it will end. Westernization of the education system, vastly improved literacy levels, better nutritional standards, advanced health and hygiene, introduction of social services and inclusion of the poorer classes in democratic political processes all have had tremendous impact on the old way of life. The Arabs wonder if it will be for the better.

## CHAPTER III

### A CLASH OF CULTURES: THE EXPULSION OF SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS FROM EGYPT

The relationship of the Egyptian military and its Soviet advisors represents a classic example of how to completely disregard cultural differences. Soviet indifference and rudeness eventually became a major factor in the ultimate Egyptian decision to expel them. In looking back over the entire seventeen year history of the Russian stay in Egypt, it is evident that the Soviets could not have done worse, even if they had deliberately set out to antagonize their Egyptian clients. This chapter will briefly outline the historical background of the Soviets in Egypt, discuss the termination of their military advisory role, and then examine in detail the perceptions and cultural problems which caused the expulsion.<sup>1</sup>

#### BACKGROUND

Russian influence first moved into Egypt in 1955, barely three years after the Free Officer's Movement overthrew King Farouk. Soon after the coup d'etat, Nasser made a strong plea to the United States for the arms required to put the Egyptian Army on an equal footing with the Israelis. When no progress could be made, Egyptian public opinion as well as pressure from his officer corps persuaded Nasser to turn toward the Soviet Union. It was during this time that Egypt and the Soviets began to realistically look at each other and both saw the potential value of a military relationship. At first, the Russians moved very cautiously. It was the year of the Four Power summit in Switzerland and they did not want to prejudice the "spirit of Geneva." So they suggested to the

Egyptians that the arms transaction be nominally concluded through Czechoslovakia.<sup>2</sup> This was acceptable to the Egyptians and on 27 December 1955, Nasser announced the conclusion of a trade agreement in which Czechoslovakia committed herself to supply arms "according to the needs of the Egyptian Army on a purely commercial basis."<sup>3</sup> The Russians had their foot in the Middle East's door, and they would get a lot of sand on that boot over the next seventeen years. Moscow quickly showed that it would establish strong ties with Egypt and expand its dedication to the equipping and training of the Egyptian Army.

The 1956 Suez war provided the Soviet Union with an even greater opportunity to demonstrate its good will and patronage to Egypt. The Israelis invaded Sinai 29-30 October 1956, and the British and French also attacked Egypt the next day. The Russians were slow to react to this crisis because at that same time, the Soviet Army was tied down with combat operations in Hungary, and it took nearly a week for the Soviets to move. Soviet Chairman Nicolai Bulganin sent threatening notes to the French, British and Israeli governments, which along with US pressure, caused a ceasefire on 7 November. Then the Soviets became even more strident in their diplomatic action and loudly proclaimed their support for Egypt in TASS:

Soviet citizens among whom there are great numbers of pilots, tankmen, artillery men and officers who took part in the Great Fatherland War (World War II) and are now in reserve, asking to be allowed to go to Egypt as volunteers so as to fight together with the Egyptian people for the expulsion of aggressors from Egyptian land.<sup>4</sup>

This support, along with another arms deal concluded immediately after the fighting had a favorable impact on the Egyptians' public opinion of the Russians.<sup>5</sup>

However, after the systematic and total destruction of the Egyptian Army by the Israelis during the June 1967 Six Day War, the situation began to change. The Egyptians became disillusioned under the pall of defeat. They felt with some justification that the Russians had let them down in their terrible crisis. Anti-Soviet sentiment began to surface and Nasser himself contributed to the Arab anger against the Soviet Union. In his resignation speech of 9 June 1967, he described how Egypt's defeat was in part due to its heeding Moscow's urgent request not to start a war.<sup>6</sup> In the period of post war depression and humiliation, Egyptian soldiers and airmen began to talk against their Soviet advisors. Mohammed Meikal states that some of the resentment against the Russians found its way into the press during 1967. He tells the following story:

One of the experts, (Russian) who had been attached to the air force, wrote a report in which he claimed that its officers, especially those in the Cairo West Base, were lazy and incompetent. The Russian claimed that after the first Israeli strike, he had noticed that there were three Sukhoys still intact on the runway, so he told some of the pilots to fly them to safety. They said they had no orders, and after a quarter of an hour the Israelis came back and destroyed these planes too. This report reached General Fawzi, the new Minister of War, and helped to exacerbate feelings.<sup>7</sup>

From 1967 onward, the relationship of the Soviet advisors and the Egyptian military seemed to be troubled by friction, strained feelings and mistrust. This situation was not helped

by the sudden death of President Nasser. On 28 September 1970, less than 24 hours after he had mediated an end to fighting in Jordan between the Army and the Palestinians, Gamal Abd al-Nasser died of a heart attack. He had ruled Egypt for nearly twenty years and left his country in an almost de facto military alliance with the Soviet Union. In fact, the rebuilding efforts had actually increased the Soviet military presence in Egypt since the Six Day War.<sup>8</sup> By 1970, the Soviet Union had, in response to Egyptian requests for assistance, occupied military bases in Egypt and Soviet military personnel were operating aircraft and surface to air missile sites. Although they had increased their military aid in certain types of defensive weaponry, the Soviets were not confident about their ability to contain any future contest between the Arabs and the Israelis. They were even more uneasy at this time because the US was disentangling itself from Vietnam and appeared ready to play a more active role in restraining the expansion of Soviet influences. With this in mind, the Soviets encouraged a status quo situation for the Arab-Israeli problem which became very unpopular with the Egyptian leadership. By 1971, Russian unpopularity seemed to be gaining in Egypt.<sup>9</sup> Also contributing to the problem was the heavy handedness of many Russian representatives; friction with the military advisors; the virtual takeover of bases by the Soviets; and the no war, no peace situation. Finally Egyptian patience wore thin and President Sadat unexpectedly announced the expulsion of Soviet advisors on 19 July 1972.

### THE GREAT DIVORCE

The cool deliberate speech in which President Anwar El-Sadat unilaterally terminated the mission of the Soviet advisors was as decisive a shift in Soviet-Egyptian relations as the initial Czech arms deal of 1955. Sadat announced to a jubilant Egyptian people that: "all decisions taken must emanate from our own free will and the Egyptian personality, and in service to the people of Egypt who never accepted to enter into spheres of influence." He added "... political decisions must be made in Egypt by its political leadership without having to seek permission from any quarter, whatsoever its status." He noted the clash of Soviet-Egyptian attitudes by saying "there were differences at times in our points of view, but I was always under the impression that these were normal differences."<sup>10</sup>

It is interesting to note that, even though there had been a marked increase of friction between the Russian advisors and the Egyptian military, the decision to oust the Soviets caught Washington completely by surprise. US press reports carried stories of key US officials being "stunned" by the move and that urgent high level meetings were held to assess the move's impact.<sup>11</sup> Then Secretary of State Henry Kissinger stated that "the decision came as a complete surprise to Washington."<sup>12</sup> But two days after the expulsion speech, Kissinger prepared a reflective analysis in which he set forth his perspective of the ouster as being a result of both US-USSR rapprochement and Egyptian disillusionment.

It has been apparent in the last two months that the Egyptians have resigned themselves to the fact that there will be little diplomatic movement on the Arab-Israeli problem this year because of the US elections... Despite this apparently rational calculation, Sadat has faced the dilemma of how to avoid allowing inaction to produce a permanent freeze of the situation....frustration over lack of movement on the Arab-Israeli issue has been high in Cairo.

The US-USSR Summit confirmed the sense that nothing was going to happen this year and brought to a head criticism of the Soviet role that had been going on in Cairo even before the summit.<sup>13</sup>

The shock of the Egyptian announcement had hardly subsided when most of the approximately 20,000 Soviet advisors were headed back to Russia. This rapid, almost total, Soviet withdrawal was generally attributed to Russian anger over the insulting way in which they were asked to leave. Another reason may have been the Soviet conclusion that the Egyptian military could not master the equipment they had given them, and that they would never be able to train the Egyptians into an efficient fighting force.<sup>14</sup> But perhaps more descriptive of the Soviet mood toward the Egyptians was the comment attributed to a high Soviet source that "they realized that, if there were to be another round, their Egyptian clients would make such a poor showing that Russia would be made to look ludicrous."<sup>15</sup>

In hindsight, the Egyptian-Soviet break appears to have been caused by complex influences of political, economic, military and cultural forces. There can be no doubt that the US-USSR Summit contributed to the Egyptian perception that both the US and the Soviet Union had vested interests in maintaining peace (i.e., the status quo) in the Middle East. However, the Egyptians became

indignant because they saw themselves as the victims of the Soviet desire to maintain a "no peace, no war" policy.

Economically, there also was dissatisfaction because Egypt was heavily dependent on the sale of cotton to Western markets to earn foreign exchange. Unfortunately, Egypt had to mortgage much of its crop to the Russians to pay for Soviet arms shipments. If this were not enough, additional friction arose because the bilateral trade agreements allowed the Soviets to compete with the Egyptians in the European cotton markets.<sup>16</sup> This situation usually meant that the Egyptians received depressed prices for their cotton. This unfavorable arrangement kept the Egyptians in a permanent creditor relationship with the Russians and severely limited their ability to obtain either the goods or cash with which to operate their economy.

On the military side there was also much dissatisfaction, especially at the upper levels, because the Soviets were reluctant to provide adequate numbers of offensive weapons. Nasser's last months as well as Sadat's initial period in office were spent in time-consuming negotiations for Soviet arms. As these negotiations dragged on and on because of the Soviet reluctance to give the Egyptians a real offensive capability, the talks became more like bazaar haggling than discussions between allies.<sup>17</sup>

Culturally, the Soviets were generally obtuse in dealing with the Egyptians. Russian attitudes questioned Egyptian sovereignty and cut deeply into Egyptian sensitivity. President Sadat recalls that "the Soviet Union began to feel that it enjoyed a privileged position in Egypt - so much so that the Soviet Ambassador had assumed a position comparable to the British High Commissioner in

the days of the British occupation of Egypt."<sup>18</sup> This attitude did little to help Russian popularity in Egypt and strangely, the Soviets did little to change their image. When not on duty the Russian advisors kept mainly to themselves, and even their children had their own playgrounds. Egyptian sources took note that they had even purchased a lot of expensive property in the center of Cairo for their self-isolation.<sup>19</sup> Individually, the Soviets had a reputation for aloofness. This isolation and their personal behavior did not endear them to the normally gregarious Egyptians. For example, when a stranger, an Egyptian, tried out his three words of Russian on them in the street, the Russians usually would look the other way.<sup>20</sup> It should be no surprise that of the various factors affecting the Soviet expulsion - political, cultural, economic and military - the cultural factor was probably the most significant to the average Egyptian. On 19 July, after Sadat's expulsion speech, there was a tumultuous outpouring of emotion by the entire Egyptian people. They had perceived the loss of their national self-respect to the Soviet Union, and Sadat's popular act had regained it. With all its efforts, the Kremlin had failed to translate its essentially pro-Arab policy into an effective political relationship with the Egyptian people. This failure was due mainly to the strain caused by cultural differences.

#### THE EGYPTIAN PERCEPTION OF THE SOVIETS

As a Third World client of the Russians, the Egyptians found them difficult to deal with at the personal level. For example, after the Six Day War, Egyptian officers generally did not get along well with their Soviet advisors. Various sources say that one of the Soviet military's main problems

at that time was the downward shift in quality and professionalism of the advisors sent to Egypt after 1967. In this regard, the Egyptian editor and astute political analyst, Mohammed Heikal states, "...in the aftermath of the 1967 war ...the current quality of the experts (Soviet) was uneven, and many commanders, junior as well as senior, found their continual presence irksome."<sup>21</sup>

Along with this was the basic mental inflexibility of the Soviet military with instances where Soviet behavior was considered totally arrogant and disparaging to the Egyptians.

Another area which contributed to a poor image was the experiences of the Egyptian military students who went to the Soviet Union. It appears that few Arabs visited Russian homes and that there was generally a lack of mixing.<sup>22</sup> Heikal quotes a particularly revealing figure in this regard. He claims that of the approximately 200,000 Arab military students who have been to the Soviet Union, fewer than 100 have married Russians. Conversely, he claims that half of the 15,000 Arab students who went to the US in the late fifties and sixties married American girls.<sup>23</sup>

Perception of the Soviets was not helped by their ineptness at cultural exchanges. For instance the Soviet Ministry of Cultural Affairs rented one of Cairo's finest cinemas, the Odeon, to show Russian films. This should have been a successful program because Egyptians love to attend movies. However, the Odeon films were attended by only 2-3 people per showing. The Egyptian press

attributed the poor reception to the films' dramatization of socialist values which Egyptians found boring.<sup>24</sup> This disparaging perception of the Soviets continued through the late 1960's and into the 1970's. It would not be difficult for these cultural misunderstandings to spill over into the military relationship.

#### MILITARY PROBLEMS ARISING FROM CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

As the Russian presence in Egypt matured, cultural differences, attitudes and strained personal relationships took their toll on the Soviet military assistance program. Deteriorating interpersonal relationships played a large part in President Sadat's decision to expel the Soviets as he himself noted: "One of the reasons was the Soviet attitude to me..."<sup>25</sup> There can be no doubt that the attitudes and actions of the Soviet advisors caused much friction. In addition to the considerable differences in language and customs, the Russians insulted Egyptian self-respect with their absolute takeover of bases; their condescending attitude towards Egyptian military prowess and the measured amount and poor quality of military equipment allotted to the Egyptian army.

#### SOVIET CONTROL OF BASES

Officially there were no Soviet bases, only "facilities," such as the airfields at Mansura, Jiyanklis, Inchas, Cairo West, Bani Suef, Aswan and some others such as Wadi Natrun. They also had naval bases at Mersa Matruh, Alexandria and Port Said.<sup>26</sup> However, there began to be indications that Soviet facilities had caused some Egyptian concern about the Russians behaving like "usurpers" with their virtual takeover of Egyptian

bases. Relationships were strained by actions such as in the Nile desert where certain roads leading to Russian installations were closed to traffic with local inhabitants admitted only with a Russian pass.<sup>27</sup> Even the usually sympathetic Lebanese based Communist daily newspaper, Al Nida, reported that the Egyptian Command objected to the strict control which the Soviet advisors exercised over the military bases where they were in charge.<sup>28</sup> Also Israeli sources were aware that the Soviets had closed classified areas such as Wadi Natrun Airbase where MIG-23 aircraft were stationed.<sup>29</sup> Recent interviews with Egyptian officers confirmed the denial of entry to Soviet bases to Egyptian officers and emphasized the general indignation at these Soviet prerogatives.

The scope of the Soviet base situation caused many stories to circulate among the Egyptians. There was even a report that Sadat himself no longer had access to Soviet bases on Egyptian soil. In March of 1972 President Sadat invited Libya's President Quadhahafi, who was attending an Arab League Conference in Cairo to accompany him to visit the Soviet Naval Facility at Mersa Matruh. The two Arab heads of state left Cairo in their official motorcade preceded by the usual security-force and motorcycles. Upon arrival, Sadat allegedly became furious when the Soviet Commandant of the facility firmly refused to allow his party to enter. Finally, after telephoning the Soviet Ambassador, Valdimir Vinogradov, in Cairo, it was decided that only President Sadat was to be admitted.<sup>30</sup> The story, probably only partially true, is a prime example of the type of anti-Soviet rumors which commonly spread throughout the country for ready local consumption and embellishment.

### FRICITION WITH SOVIET MILITARY ADVISORS

"Everyone wanted change because every officer suffered from the advisors" was a comment from a typical high ranking Egyptian officer.<sup>31</sup> Shortly after the expulsion, the Arab press picked up on the stories concerning strained relationships between Egyptian officers and Soviet advisors, detailing these problems as "important factors in the recall of the Russians," and noting that "daily friction created an unhealthy atmosphere and irritabilities."<sup>32</sup>

The Egyptian military felt that the mere presence of the Soviet military in their country reflected on their self-respect as well as the ability of the Egyptian military to command. But the Soviet mission was much more than a mere mission, and therein lies much of the problem. The Soviet advisors numbered about 20,000 with approximately 5,000 officers saturating all of the Egyptian military organizations down to battalion and even lower in the case of tank and artillery units. In the Navy also there were advisors placed at the top, starting with the Chief of the Navy, down to an advisor on each ship or patrol boat.<sup>33</sup> This saturation of advisory assistance, both in and outside of the military, caused a great deal of resentment because the Russian advisors had a direct access path to high authorities, and few things escaped their watchful eyes.

The Soviet military approach at times added to the Egyptian resentment. One situation came about when a very senior Soviet officer was to fly in to an Egyptian camp and address the officers. The Russian arrived and proceeded to lecture the assembled officers in detail on the virtues of promptness. Apparently unbeknownst to the Russian, his lecture was received as an insult and

the officers were infuriated that an advisor would have the nerve to make such a talk. It is probable that the Soviet officer never knew the long lasting ill effect his lecture had.<sup>34</sup>

Some sources have reported that many Soviet advisors were frustrated by the inability or disinclination of many Egyptians to grasp highly technical warfare.<sup>35</sup> This Soviet frustration led to an arrogance which infuriated the Egyptians. The Soviet disdain for Egyptian military prowess and technical ability fanned the atmosphere of mistrust and dislike. According to an Egyptian military source, the Soviet advisors were constantly pointing out that the Egyptian efforts were not too good and they cultivated an opinion that the Egyptians were militarily incompetent. In Cairo one senior Soviet military advisor reportedly told his Western colleague: "You have an expression in the West: 'give us the tools and we'll do the job,' here in Egypt they have changed it slightly. Now it's, 'give us the job and we'll wreck the tools!'"<sup>36</sup>

Another story that made the rounds in 1972 was that the Egyptians realized their Soviet advisors were not giving honest evaluations and assistance in their work such as pointing out errors in the Egyptian situation estimates and war plans. The Egyptian staff came to the disturbing conclusion that the Russians had been patronizingly approving any and all Egyptian assessments, no matter how faulty. To confirm their suspicions, a draft sector defense plan was prepared which deliberately left out some basic considerations. The Russians examined, then returned the plan with fine grades, thus proving the Egyptian suspicions.<sup>37</sup>

Another area which caused the Egyptian-advisor friction was the Egyptian fear that the Soviets were plundering Egypt's limited supply of gold. It was commonly believed that the Russians were taking advantage of their many military flights between Cairo and the Soviet Union to smuggle out high amounts of gold. One story relates how Minister of Defense Sadeq himself supervised the arrest of some Soviet officers at Cairo Airport attempting to smuggle 30 kilograms of gold to Russia. This incident caused an international row with official protests on both sides.<sup>38</sup>

#### SOVIET-MILITARY AID

Following the Six Day War, the Soviet Union's policy was to build up the Egyptian armed forces to a point where they would not be totally vulnerable to an Israeli attack. This buildup, however, was not intended by the Soviets to provide enough weaponry to allow an Egyptian offensive to regain its lost territory. For example, the devastated air force initially was rebuilt through the addition of obsolete MIG 15 and 17 fighter bombers from Soviet surplus stocks. Even surface to air missiles were not significantly increased and the Russians only symbolically satisfied longstanding Egyptian requests for surface to surface missiles. Vital artillery stocks were rebuilt to only about one-third of their pre-war levels, and anti-tank weapons were not significantly modernized.<sup>39</sup> This limiting of the supply pipeline upset Egyptian officers as they perceived that their offensive capability was slipping away and a general letdown began to take effect in the armed forces. The Egyptians realized that the Soviets

were not ready to provide the weapons needed for offensive operations against Israel and thus they began a period of haggling in an attempt to increase arms shipments. This divergence of views on the amount and type of aid contributed to the Egyptian conclusion that "the Soviet Union was getting more out of Egypt than it was putting in."<sup>40</sup> This feeling of being manipulated by one of the superpowers caused a sober assessment by the Egyptians of the treatment they were receiving from Russia. In discussions with Tito, Nasser expressed the Egyptian frustration when he said, "please tell the Soviet Union that I would be more willing to accept defeat -- anything, in fact -- than to be treated like this."<sup>41</sup>

The one-sided artillery and air duels over the canal in the War of Attrition, however, convinced the Russians to increase their arms shipments to prevent Israeli domination of the confrontation. Not only did the Soviets dramatically improve the Egyptian air defense, but a cross canal attack capability was provided. As necessary as it was, this move was still too late to salvage the Russian image. Egyptian resentment, frustration and the feeling of being used by the Russians in the game of power politics with the US had done too much damage.

Restriction in arms shipments was not the only area of concern in dealing with Soviet equipment. The Egyptian military's restiveness was also compounded by the belief that it was given obsolete equipment, kept low on spare parts and ammunition and given extremely complicated instructions on maintenance and operations.<sup>42</sup> It should be noted that complaints about Soviet equipment were not limited to the military. The quality of Soviet

bloc products was particularly troublesome to Egyptian technocrats and businessmen, who were well aware of Western standards of quality and who were alarmed at equipment breakdowns and shoddy material. A Christian Science Monitor article on this problem noted that:

Egyptian officials and merchants specifically complained about Soviet trucks, Hungarian locomotives, East German automobiles, the higher sulfur content of Soviet crude oil and the presence of foreign matter in some shipments of wheat sold to Egypt.<sup>43</sup>

The low esteem Egyptians had for Soviet equipment was compounded by the seeming technical superiority of the US equipped Israelis. In fact, after the 1967 war, the Israelis made use of thousands of captured Egyptian vehicles of Soviet manufacture. These vehicles were often the butt of Israeli jokes, especially the jeeps, which they called "Russian cadillacs", as they sat steaming over alongside Israeli roads.<sup>44</sup>

One well known Egyptian story which illustrates the Egyptian distrust of Soviet equipment relates to the deep strikes of the Israeli air force into Egypt during 1970. The Egyptian air force attempted to challenge and blunt the strikes, but they were unsuccessful, losing one or two aircraft in each attempt. The Russian advisors claimed that the losses were due to the poor quality of the Egyptian pilots, and in denial, the Egyptian pilots publicly claimed that their MIG's were no match for the Israeli phantoms because the MIG was an inferior fighter aircraft. According to various sources the complaining officers were punished, and Soviet pilots were detailed to fly the next interceptor missions to quell the uproar about inferior planes. On 30 July 1970,

the first time the Soviets took to the air in 12 MIG-21s, the Israelis reportedly shot down four planes in a matter of minutes. Some say that there was almost as much celebrating over this event in Cairo as there was in Tel Aviv as officers' messes jubilantly offered toast after toast to the "gallant professionalism of the Soviet fighting man." "You'd think they had won a battle," a Russian air force advisor was quoted as grumbling bitterly.<sup>45</sup>

#### SOVIET RUDENESS AND LACK OF COURTESY

The various previously stated problems between the Egyptians and their Soviet advisors such as the indignation over control of bases, the friction between the advisor and advisee and the slow delivery of Russian military equipment were seriously exacerbated by the poor personal relationships of the Soviets. On the surface the Egyptian people seemed to tolerate the Russians, or at least the government's public opinion polls said so, but Egyptian frustration with the Soviets was inching upwards in 1970.<sup>46</sup> The military friction which had existed since the 1967 defeat was slowly making itself known to the man in the street. Encouraged by the turbulent transition atmosphere following the death of Nasser, more and more stories of gauche Soviet military behavior began to surface.

General Mohammed Sadeq, the Egyptian Commander in Chief and War Minister, was known to be highly critical of Soviet personnel behavior in private talks to Egyptian officers. His attitudes were even more important because he was enormously popular with the young Egyptian officers. He had been known for sometime as a leading force in pressuring the government to expell the Russians. Sadeq's dislike was mutual as the Russians also

worked hard to have him relieved of command. It obviously was not a good situation for mutual trust and cooperation and the disagreements steadily increased. In order to cope with advisor problems in a professional manner, Sadeq had established a so-called "Court of Honor" system to deal with problems between the Egyptian military and their advisors. Rising tensions early in 1972 caused these court of honor incidents to increase from a relative handful to an average of 80 cases a month. This is a clear indication that the advisory role was causing much unrest and bad feeling in the army.<sup>47</sup> There were also some reported military incidents such as scattered unit mutinies on the Canal and arrests of some air force officers at Beni Suef Airbase. These were tense times as there was also an alleged incident of an officer making an anti-Soviet speech to the assembled faithful at Cairo's al Huseini Mosque urging the military to take charge of its own destiny and start a Jihad.<sup>48</sup>

As time went on the difficulties between Sadeq and the Russians were compounded by Egyptian internal politics and eventually, despite his popularity, Sadeq was relieved by the Navy Commander, Ahmad Ismail Ali. This change, however, did not quiet the military pressure for a change in the Soviet relationship. After Sadeq's departure, the Egyptian Army Chief of Staff, LT Gen Saad al Din Shadhili, continued to receive reports of Soviet rudeness. At one banquet a Soviet General was feeling the effect of heavy drinking and, during after dinner remarks, called Egypt an "unfaithful paramour." General Shadhili demanded and obtained

the recall of this officer.<sup>49</sup> It is obvious that such tactless behavior and comments could understandably cause much difficulty in personal relationships.

There were numerous other occasions for the Soviets to put their foot in their mouths and to make what was perceived as insults against Egypt. For instance, in addressing General Shadhili and other senior Egyptian officers, the senior Soviet military advisor made what was considered to be an openly contemptuous remark. He reportedly said, "you are like a man with two wives and do not know which one to choose."<sup>50</sup> This was immediately received as a negative reflection on Egyptian manhood and the advisor was sent packing after intense pressure from Shadhili.

Considering the number of such insensitive remarks, it appears that the Russians were unable to understand the cultural importance of self-respect and honor to the Arabs. One reason for their inflexibility may lie in Russian culture and that peculiar mindset which President Saddam Hussein of Iraq once called the "Siberian mentality."<sup>51</sup> At times even Radio Moscow did its best to undermine efforts to cooperate with the Egyptians. After the Six Day War, a Soviet broadcast in Arabic, no less entitled "Reasons for the Arab Defeat," attributed the collapse of the Egyptian Army to a backward social structure.<sup>52</sup> Various military writers also climbed on the bandwagon and wrote scathing attacks on the Egyptian Army's professional shortcomings with statements like, "their officer businessmen who were more concerned with business than combat training of soldiers and NCO's."<sup>53</sup>

### THE SOVIET LESSON

The Russian failure in Egypt brought to an end their largest and most far reaching foreign military involvement since World War II. There can be no doubt that many of the problems were caused by cultural conflicts and failures by the Russians to understand the Arab psychology. In retrospect, it seems as if the Russians deliberately tried to cultivate a poor image in Egypt with their haughty treatment of the military and their distribution of military supplies and equipment. It is understandable how the Egyptians came to feel they were being used. In hindsight, it is no wonder that thousands of hysterical Egyptians poured into the streets to celebrate the Soviet ouster as an assertion of national pride and identity. Yet, although one might conclude that these problems could have been avoided, what assurance does the US have that we are not making the same mistakes?

## CHAPTER IV

### A CONTRAST OF CULTURES IN THE ARAB MILITARY

It is obvious that a basic understanding of Arab military institutions and their underlying culture is an important requirement for any possible US military activity in the Arab world. This chapter will take a brief look at the military institutions of Egypt and Saudi Arabia and examine their underlying cultural differences. These two Arab countries have been chosen because their militaries represent opposite ends of the Arab cultural spectrum and they provide a good general comparison of the diversity in Arab military attitudes. Each military will be examined as to its role in the structure of society as well as its general character. Egypt's army will be discussed as a force for evolution and change that has been vitally concerned with the backwardness of its society. The impact of Egypt's social change on the military itself is an area of particular importance in understanding the army's present role.

At the other end of the spectrum from Egypt is the Saudi Arabian military, an army acting along with other traditional elements of society to support the established order. Unlike the Egyptians, Saudi high ranking officers are generally drawn from the ruling groups and serve the existing monarchy as a prop against change. One must understand that Saudi military

personnel are generally recruited as a result of tribal obligations and allegiances to the crown and, therefore, the Saudi army reinforces the conservative image of the regime's Bedouin culture.

### EGYPT

#### THE STRUCTURE OF SOCIETY

Prior to analyzing the significance of the military in the social structure, it is first necessary to briefly understand the overall structure of Egyptian society. Egypt probably can be described as an age old social system ruled by a highly centralized government with a large army ready to resolve internal conflict. Through the centuries Egyptian society has developed around the Nile River in thousands of basically self-reliant villages containing closely knit family groups.<sup>1</sup> The reasons for ancient Egypt's greatness, the Nile and desert barriers against invasions, have also contributed to an inward focus of Egyptian society.

There are two basic groups in Egyptian society: the peasants and the elite. Until lately, the peasants or fellahs performed their drudgery on the land and existed at barely adequate levels. In modern times there has been a mass exodus of the lower class to the cities where 40% of the population now resides.<sup>2</sup> The peasants who have moved

to the cities are now mixed with the small urban working class, but they are still essentially peasants. The government of Egypt recognizes the value of the peasant as the backbone of the nation and has instituted many social and economic assistance programs in his behalf.

The second major grouping is the elite class made up of the well educated, professional military officers, government officials and businessmen.<sup>3</sup> There is a definite social gap between the fellah and the elite and the demarcation is usually defined by wealth, education, occupation and the influence of European culture. Yet, despite the gap, recent leaders such as Nasser and Sadat both came from modest village backgrounds to national prominence through the officer corps.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the 1952 revolution, Egypt's situation according to the Egyptian scholar Anouar Abdel Malik was a story of capitalism, imperialism and injustice.<sup>5</sup> However, since that time the government has been trying to mold its society into a "New Egypt," and establish a democratic, socialist, cooperative system. In doing so, the government at times had to use the Army to inject itself into traditional social areas which had previously been managed over the years by various traditional institutions.

Despite occasional problems, this new social system seems to be working as Egyptian leaders construct a state based on allegiance to a set of unifying national ideals, while governing through the traditional Egyptian authoritarian political system backed by the Army.

### THE CHARACTER OF THE EGYPTIAN MILITARY

Prior to 1973 the character of the Egyptian military was assessed by the West in a cultural context of overall incompetence. This assessment was essentially based on observations of the 1948, 1956 and 1967 wars with the Israelis. Studies of these various campaigns point out that Egyptian problems of poor field generalship, surprise and tactical errors were generally the cause for defeat. Unfortunately the world view of these defeats was that the Egyptian Army was inferior and cowardly. After the tough campaign in Yemen and the subsequent loss of the Sinai in 1967 when the army was militarily beaten and psychologically demoralized, the Egyptian armed forces began to question their own character.

It was at this time that Egyptian military leaders had to turn to the basic character of the Egyptian soldier in tailoring training to his culture and appealing to his sense of honor, while injecting the motivating ideals of Islam. Military planners took the Egyptian peasants, who were very traditional in their outlook and behavior, and modified their training and tactics to comply with cultural attitudes so that they could achieve an acceptable standard of battlefield performance. Professor John W. Amos, II of the Naval Postgraduate School, has made an interesting study of how the Egyptians took standard Soviet military techniques and hardware and blended them with Arab behavioral traits.<sup>6</sup> One example was in training where an understanding of the Egyptian repetitive, learning by rote educational system allowed that process to be converted to military operations and equipment maintenance. The process was simple:

more attention to detail, rote drill for the soldiers and simplify the skills required. Along with this simple learning process, the army underwent intensive reorganization and retraining maneuvers to reinforce their military skills.

At this point, it may be useful to reflect on whether the portrayal of the Egyptians, or indeed the character of all Arabs, as cowardly and incompetent stems mainly from a misunderstanding of their culture, or was it a media error. The noted military analyst, Edward Luttwak, has held a minority view on this difference for years and in his work on the Israeli Army he points out the importance of understanding Arab culture before making faulty assumptions on their military competence:

The Egyptian soldier is as brave and steadfast as any individual, but there are basic weaknesses in Egyptian, and in Arab, group behavior. The distinction is basic and it has a direct operational implication on the defensive line, where each man can carry out his task on his own fixed role or position, and there is therefore no need of officer leadership or small group solidarity. Egyptians have historically fought rather well.<sup>7</sup>

Former President Sadat must be given much personal credit for restoring the Egyptian soldier's sense of honor. He knew the importance of honor to the Arab and knew that it would have to be re-won, because the Army's honor had been tarnished in previous combat with the Israelis. To accomplish this, he tied the army's honor to the success of the Canal crossing operation. In his first directive to the armed forces, issued immediately after his appointment as President, he clearly indicated the sense of lost honor:

Our objective is clear. It is battle until victory. This makes it imperative that each should know his task well that victory may be ensured. You should know that we are facing an enemy that is beginning to set little store by us, thinking that we are not capable of fighting, which makes him rampage in the region without fear of being repelled or punished.<sup>8</sup>

The theme that Egyptian honor was at stake was a standard army indoctrination theme and Sadat focused on the role of the officer corps as the "guardians of Egypt."<sup>9</sup>

In motivating the army and revitalizing its character, the Egyptian leadership went back to the traditional appeal of defense of the land, defense of honor and defense of Islam.<sup>10</sup> These calls appealed to the peasants' traditional values. Special emphasis was placed on the Islamic theme by choosing Badr as the name of the 1973 operation, identifying the crossing operation as a jihad, and using the traditional Muslim battlecry: Allahu Akbar! (God is Greater).

The operational code name for the 1973 Canal crossing, Operation Badr, had particular Islamic significance. First, the term in Arabic means full moon. Also the date of the attack was set for October, the Islamic holy month of Ramadan, a time of great religious significance and fasting. Coincidentally, October 6th was the day on which the Prophet prepared for the first Battle of Badr in 624 A.D. In this battle, a small force led by the Prophet defeated a large Meccan force.<sup>11</sup> Thus, Badr is considered the first victory of Islam and is interpreted in the Koran as a divine sanction of the new faith. No doubt the choice of Operation Badr was also meant to be a cultural symbol to the Egyptians for a reaffirmation of Islam as well as a test of honor.

## THE MILITARY AS A FORCE IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM

Prior to the 1952 Free Officer Movement's overthrow of Farouk, it was customary for officers to rise to the top in the Egyptian Army more by virtue of their "birth and girth" than by ability.<sup>12</sup> Led by Gamal Nasser, the lower middle class junior officers cleverly moved the aristocratic senior officers out of the picture and took over Egypt. The establishment of a military regime is considered by the Egyptian sociologist, Dr. Anouar Abdel Malek, to be the continuation of a historical Egyptian theme, i.e., Egypt's army taking steps to win back Egypt's independence.<sup>13</sup>

The immediate benefit of the Free Officer Movement was that government was run by a group whose initial image was one of complete devotion to the public interest. The Arab military scholar, J. C. Hurewitz, recalls them as "dynamic, tough, durable, innovative."<sup>14</sup> P.J. Vatikiotis in his work, The Egyptian Army in Politics, agreed that:

The military rulers of Egypt are a nationalistic revolutionary group of ex-army officers bent on maintaining the independence of their country while desiring to modernize it through industrialization and other means.<sup>15</sup>

With this background, the military eventually became the dominant force in Egyptian politics. Amos Perlmutter writes that the development of the army as the core group in government led Egypt to quickly become a praetorian state:

Nasserized and professionalized, the military under Sadat acts as expected of the only dominating political structure, identifying military corporate aspirations with Egypt's national interest.<sup>16</sup>

But there was another factor in the rule of the military; one which has endured since the early days of the revolution. Initially the military had little governmental experience, so a bond was formed with the governmental technocrats that lasts to this day. The pragmatic Egyptian mind had blended the military officers' dedication with the expertise of trusted civil servants who were able to frame workable policy decisions and create the Egypt we know today.

#### THE IMPACT OF SOCIAL CHANGE

The rate of social change has not had as dramatic an impact on the Egyptian military that it has on other segments of society. One reason for this is the traditionally expected revolutionary role of the military elite, as Be'eri notes:

The history of Islam not only relates numerous examples of soldiers seizing power; it also shapes the views of those seeking power and predisposes those on whom it is imposed to regard the rule of officer/politician as a genuine continuation of the national tradition.<sup>17</sup>

Another reason for the lessened impact of social change on the military in Egypt is that the military leaders were generally men of demonstrated ability who fairly easily replaced the traditional institutions in articulating public desires and aspirations. Also the military was, and still is, considered a good training ground for governmental posts, making a strong bond between the civilian and military elite sectors and providing the military with useful post retirement employment.<sup>18</sup>

There have been, however, some impacts of social change on the military which should be discussed. One impact since the overthrow of King Farouk, about thirty years ago, has been the steady decrease in the social gap between officers and enlisted men. This change in democratizing the army has served to create a new attitude toward military service. In the introduction to his The Egyptian Army in Politics, Vatikiotis points out Egypt's peculiar historical relationship between the military and society. He argues that for centuries, the inhabitants of the Nile Valley villages were largely exempt from military service, but that after the 1967 war, military service became "a national duty;" this began to upgrade the overall quality of the army.<sup>19</sup> At the same time under President Sadat, more and more high quality recruits came to the military for reasons of security, prestige and tradition as well as the aforementioned sense of duty. One result of recruiting better educated soldiers was the overall improvement of military education. The influx of better educated men led the regime to improve the quality of its military schools. These schools began to graduate young professional officers; men who had a sense of purpose, and whose social views generally coincided with that of the country's leadership.

Another impact of social change was the development of new motivational concepts which were designed to be meaningful to the cultural makeup of the Egyptian soldier. Some of these slogans are nationalistic, but many like Allahu Akbar! appeal to the Islamic cultural background of the soldiers.

Thus, the Egyptian military can be viewed as a traditional force for both social and political change which has climbed to the top of the power structure. The Egyptian Army has had its problems, but has worked hard to regain its honor and self-respect as a competent military force. The rapid social changes have had some recent dramatic impacts on the army, but these changes appear to have been handled fairly well and channelled through traditional cultural mechanisms, such as adherence to Islamic ideals and an interface with the Nile Valley village system.

#### SAUDI ARABIA

At the opposite end of the cultural spectrum from Egypt is the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. Conservative, monarchial and mindful of its essential vulnerability, Saudi Arabia is a relative newcomer to the Arab political scene. The cultural basis for the Saudi military is built upon the traditional Muslim state and infused with conservative tribal customs and Islamic law. The military itself, unlike the Egyptian army, is generally drawn from a homogenous tribal yeomanry that does not appear to be seriously affected at present by social and economic change. However, the Saudi military, like the state itself, is based on a delicate, fragile cultural system upon which the internal as well as international situations are placing considerable stress.

### THE CLASSICAL MUSLIM STATE

The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia integrates religious, state and social institutions into a classical Muslim state. The Qur'an is Saudi Arabia's constitution and the legal system rests on the Shari'a, or sacred body of Islamic law. A 1979 Defense Intelligence Agency analysis of the Saudi religious establishment details how religion pervades all aspects of public and private life and that the Saudi's remain firmly committed to an "egalitarian and literal interpretation of Islam..."<sup>20</sup>

The social structure of Saudi Arabia has the royal family at the top, ruling in an absolute manner. The House of Saud originally gained power in the early part of this century through a series of tribal wars and shrewd political maneuvers. However, considering that the Saudis were essentially composed of proud egalitarian bedouin, it has been and remains important for the royal family to maintain a consensus of support from major elements of society. This support is needed because the monarchy itself is not truly hereditary, but rather, custom decrees that successors to the throne be picked from close blood descendants. Succession is decided through a consensus involving the royal family, religious leaders, tribal leaders, ministers, advisors and the army.<sup>21</sup>

In the Saudi social system, one's lineage and family determine social position through a pyramidal structure headed by the king.<sup>22</sup> The king is the focus of all power as the head of state, shaykh of shaykhs, religious leader and commander in chief of the military. All religious, executive, legislative, judicial and military power rests with the king although some responsibilities are delegated to other members of the royal family. Below

the royal family in the stratified society are the religious leaders or the Ulama, then the more powerful shaykhs, followed by some commoners in high governmental posts such as Shaykh Ahmed Zaki Yamani, head of the Ministry of Petroleum and Mineral Resources. Other important, but lesser, layers of society are made up of professionals, the military officers, and the business community.<sup>23</sup> At the bottom of the social ladder are the bedouin, and townsmen who are the primary sources of the military recruits.

#### TRIBAL CUSTOM AND ISLAMIC LAW

Prior to the discovery of oil, most of Saudi Arabia was suitable only for raising herds of animals. Throughout history, this harsh environment fostered a complex tribal system which allowed the bedouin tribes to survive in the desert. Tribal identity and kinship are of paramount importance to a Saudi because they provide social status and extended family support. In his dissertation on Saudi society, Ibrahim Al-Awaji describes this group orientation: "The identity of the individual is identical with that of his group...individual initiative is only encouraged when it serves and enhances the interests of the group."<sup>24</sup> In Saudi Arabia, a group is a tribal system of related families claiming descent from a founding ancestor, and it is led by a shaykh. Traditionally a shaykh's position is not hereditary, but he is chosen through a consensus of the heads of tribal families of a particular tribe as a primus inter pares.<sup>25</sup> Qualities frequently looked for in a shaykh are a good economic position, courage, leadership and in recent times skill in dealing with the government and the royal family. The shaykhs are militarily important

because of the tribal basis of the Saudi army. Through the early decades of this century, King Saud was himself a shaykh who had to subdue rival shaykhs to solidify his position, and even today the loyalties of various shaykhs are bound to the crown through a system of military levees.<sup>26</sup> Tribal loyalties are a powerful force in Saudi Arabia. Some Islamic scholars have pointed out that the bedouins of Saudi Arabia are notorious for upholding Islam while straying from its principles. The transcendence of tribal law and clan loyalty are cited as reasons for the rapid ascendance of the puritanical Wahabite sect in the desert over the Sunnites, for the emergence of Ibn Saud's fanatical warrior tribesmen known as the Ikhwan (brethren), and the bitter resistance of various shaykhs to Saud's campaigns in the 1920's and 30's.<sup>27</sup>

Tribal loyalty is an important consideration for the Saudi military because the bulk of the armed forces comes from bedouin tribes. It is interesting in this regard to note that, as yet, there is no up-to-date survey of the tribes of Saudi Arabia.<sup>28</sup> This gap in demographic information would tend to support the concept that bedouin tribal custom and independence is an important Saudi consideration.

#### THE COMPOSITION OF THE SAUDI MILITARY FORCES

Because Saudi Arabia is one of the richest countries in the world, its per capita income obviously has a significant impact on the recruiting of its military forces. One would support that in a country of almost unbelievable wealth, it would be very difficult to hire soldiers. This is obviously not the case

and the economic impact on the military has been minimal. Two reasons given for this are: (1) that the bedouin prefer the military to manual labor and (2) that cooperative tribal shaykhs obligingly supply men to specific units as a demonstration of support and "vassalage" to the King.<sup>29</sup>

Saudi military forces are basically organized into three groups which reflect the cultural makeup and social concerns of Saudi Arabia. These military groupings are the National Guard, the Regular Army, and the Royal Guard. The National Guard uses the bedouin tribes for its manpower base and the units are posted in or near their respective tribal areas. Because the bedouin only rarely perform manual labor, the pay of those serving in the National Guard becomes an important source of family income.<sup>30</sup> Westerners who visit Saudi Arabia are somewhat taken back by this abhorrence for manual labor. This is a carry-over, however, from the tradition that the rights of passage to manhood include learning how to ride, shoot, and to quote from the Qur'an. This leaves the westerner in some doubt as to what the future holds for a Saudi working class when the Yemeni porters and the Pakistani and Korean laborers finally leave for home.

The Regular Army is less elite and is heavily dependent on townsmen. In this regard, the Army is in direct competition with the private sector for recruits who are both intelligent and capable enough to function in a modern, technology oriented military, which includes jet aircraft and a sea-going Navy.

The Royal Guard is the most elite unit of the Saudi forces and its duties solely involve protection of the King and the Royal Family. This force is also bedouin based and it typifies the traditional Saudi military values--born and bred in the desert, fanatically loyal to the King and Qur'an, and dedicated to preserving its unique cultural heritage.

The Saudi military, like any other segment of Arab society, is prone to internal distrust and conflict which the government has sought to overcome through balancing one element against another and placing only loyal officers in positions of trust. This has created some new problems with the expansion of Saudi forces. The Royal Family prefers to recruit and promote men from the noble tribes of the Najd region, which was the original heartland of Saudi power. However, in recent years the tremendous influence of oil money, as well as the expansion of the military, has made it difficult to find adequate numbers of capable Najds, so other lesser tribes and even townsmen are moving into positions of increasing responsibility.<sup>31</sup> It is obvious that the Saudi leadership is not comfortable with the changing requirements of an expanding force, but there is little that can be done to turn back the clock.

### THE PRIMACY OF INTERNAL DEFENSE

The mission of the military forces in Saudi Arabia is primarily that of safeguarding the national integrity of the state and protection against invasion. However there is an overriding official concern regarding possible internal disorder.<sup>32</sup> This concern requires that each military unit be prepared to assist police forces in restoring public security. It is interesting to note that both the National Guard and the Regular Army have special sections to deal with possible internal military disorders. One humorous story claims that every time the Defense Ministry purchases some new tanks for the Army, it ensures that it also buys an adequate number of anti-tank weapons for the National Guard. This obsession of the Saudi leadership with internal defense is an important consideration which must have frequent behavioral spillovers into how various units of the military is equipped and where they are stationed. It may be useful here to consider the Arab proneness for conflict and reflect on the role of the bedouin National Guard vis a vis the towns-men of the Regular Army in performing their duties in any possible internal crisis.

### SUMMARY

When one considers the socially progressive Egyptian army and its historical role as a major factor in political reform and upward mobility for its officers, the Saudi military today stands in stark contrast to the Egyptian army as a tribally oriented instrument of a classical Muslim state. Although the discussion of these two forces has been brief, the need for understanding the cultural basis and social background of Arab military forces should be evident as an important factor in dealing with US-Arab cultural impacts on military operations

## CHAPTER V

### DEALING WITH ARAB CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

The Soviets have proved that the failure to deal with cultural differences can ruin a program of huge proportion and years of effort. From studying the written guidance as well as our various advisory efforts themselves, there is no question that the US military understands the methodology and reasons behind cultural understanding. In fact, for the US the problems are mainly not in knowing what to do, but in implementing fundamental principles. For example, advice for US advisors in Vietnam was simple, clear and for the most part effective. There were nine simple rules set forth as overall guidance in dealing with the Vietnamese by the US Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (USMACV) :

1. Remember we are guests here: we make no demands and seek no special treatment.
2. Join with the people! Understand their life, use phrases from their language and honor their customs and laws.
3. Treat women with politeness and respect.
4. Make personal friends among soldiers and common people.
5. Always give the Vietnamese the right of way.
6. Be alert to security and ready to react with your military skill.
7. Don't attract attention by loud, rude or unusual behavior.
8. Avoid separating yourself from the people by a display of wealth or privilege.
9. Above all else, you are a member of the US Military Forces on a difficult mission, responsible for all your official and personal action. Reflect honor upon yourself and the United States of America.<sup>1</sup>

After learning about the "Ugly Russian" in Egypt, one cannot help but wonder what difference it would have made if the Soviets had promulgated a policy similar to the USMACV rules.

Before patting ourselves on the back, we must remember that while it is easy to set forth guidelines, it is very difficult to maintain an effective cultural policy.

Probably the most important step in dealing with Arabs is to understand that there is a cultural difference. The failure to recognize this often leads to American frustration in working with the Arabs. We attempt a systematic logical approach, but in the Arab world the indirect approach may be more effective in the long run. When one adds in the problems of personality conflict and language, there is the potential for interpersonal strain, frustration and misunderstanding. To be effective in dealing with the Arabs one must understand their culture, develop an understanding of their problem solving techniques, avoid personality and language conflicts and, above all, have patience.

#### RECOGNIZING CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

Whenever people of widely differing cultural backgrounds are brought together in pursuit of some common goals, a great deal of understanding and adjustment are required. The understanding of cultural differences may be the most important step towards effective relations. In performing a study on the effectiveness of senior Army officers assigned to military assistance programs, the Human Resources Research office of George Washington University found that:

"The failure to recognize the cultural differences reflected in the behavior, attitudes and institutions of the recipients has been a major factor in the lack of success of many of our efforts overseas."<sup>2</sup>

What happens when cultural differences are not recognized and understood is that a cultural barrier is erected through interference, misunderstanding and suspicion. As the Scottish anthropologist Norman Daniel noted, different cultural habits prevent communication and cause misunderstandings, misinterpretations and psychological filtering of the actual situation.<sup>3</sup> Adding to the military problem of understanding a foreign culture is the emotional strain of culture shock. While troop indoctrination programs may lessen the shock of alleged "rip off artiste," and "men holding hands," a much more in depth education on Arab culture is needed for senior officers before being sent to high level jobs in the Arab world.

#### THE POTENTIAL FAILURE OF US SYSTEMATIC APPROACHES

The American ability to overcome technical problems has provided us with an almost unlimited self-confidence. Often this self-confidence leads us to believe that we can handle any variety of problems, even those of a cultural nature. This sometimes false belief that we can solve any problem by throwing enough money and effort at it, often causes us to underestimate the complexity and seriousness of dealing with a foreign culture. Be aware that difficulty and failure lie in wait for any military officer operating in the Middle East who does not possess a cultural understanding of the Arab people. Anyone who confidently tries to apply a military solution to what may be in essence a cultural problem can follow in the disastrous footsteps of the Soviets. One must always consider that in dealing with Arab military forces such as the Egyptian army, there probably exist military doctrinal differences as well as cultural differences. Consider that their military may have been trained under another doctrine such as

Soviet in the case of Egypt and, although impressed by the size and quality of our assistance programs, they may not be readily inclined to embrace our doctrine.

It should also be understood that the fundamental problem of training and maneuvering large numbers of Arab troops imposes restrictions on tactical options. Arab education stresses memorization and rote learning. This system has been carried over into military training practices, and in the case of Egypt, for example, reinforced by selective Soviet tactical doctrines. Egyptian military planners have taken standard Soviet military techniques and equipment and effectively molded them towards Arab behavioral traits. For example, although initiative may be stilled, troops are exercised and reexercised through certain scenarios until they are capable of the desired maneuvers. It may sound like the long way around to an American, but it has worked for the Arabs.

#### THE INDIRECT APPROACH METHOD

The US military professional is usually a man of action who is inclined to be pragmatic, systematic and direct in his approach to a problem. He is a product of a society that respects the direct approach. In his military career he is evaluated by his ability to quickly size up a problem and then solve it decisively. Conversely, Arab society generally produces military leaders who are less direct and more leisurely in discharging their duties. In the Arab world an officer may be less willing to stick his neck out because of the cultural authoritarian system fostered in the family, the possible loss of face if a decision

another day. The concept of putting things off until tomorrow or bukra has been compared to the Spanish concept of mañana. An illustrative humorous story tells of a Spanish ambassador talking to an Arab diplomat about the similarity of bukra and mañana. "Bukra and mañana essentially mean the same thing," he said, "except mañana has much more of a sense of immediacy to it." At times even the most pro-US, trained in the States, Arab officers are reluctant to take a direct approach, and pressure by their US friends can lead to polite obstinacy, or even resentment.

One must understand the perceptions, attitudes and emotions that take place in Arab decision making, and especially their military decision making. Amos makes an interesting comment on the impact of culture on Arab military decision making:

Arab decision makers operate in terms of a complex system of threat perceptions, of images of the environment as being overwhelmingly hostile. These images are tied together by a nexus of cultural values which stress the preservation of individual or group honor at the expense of any other considerations. When this honor is endangered, it must be restored by violence - either verbal or physical. If action is not taken immediately, honor is lost. As a consequence, Arab decision makers are prone to perceive all acts or utterances as actual or potential threats. They are prone to interpret the motives of others as being suspect; prone, in a general sense, to a paranoid outlook. As a consequence, Arab assessments of themselves and their actions tend to over-compensate for this sense of threat, of vulnerability. These assessments tend, therefore, to be highly colored by this sense of honor; they feed to glorify the decision maker in question at the expense of others in his environment.<sup>4</sup>

#### PERSONALITY CONFLICT AND LANGUAGE

As was discussed in Chapter II, the Arabs are conflict prone and have an ability to see insult in even the most innocuous statements. This, coupled with the potential problem of causing

an Arab to lose face, can exacerbate even the most mild personality conflict. Arabs tend to translate most situations into a personal action. For example, Arabs considered the recurring Israeli attacks on Syrian and PLO forces in Lebanon were because "Reagan gave the green light."<sup>5</sup> They are constantly perceiving situations on a personal basis. This can lay serious traps for the insensitive or indiscreet American. This situation can even be worsened by a lack of language capability. Arab exaggeration and rhetoric can mislead the uneducated and cause deep feelings of uneasiness or even ill will. Likewise, American plain talk and a direct approach can make the Arab feel uneasy, and resentful.

#### THE VIRTUES OF PATIENCE

Patience is a virtue which must be consciously cultivated in the Arab world. It is one of the most highly admired virtues in the Middle East, and it probably is one of the traits that makes life bearable for the lower classes. It is set forth in many Arab proverbs: "Patience demolishes mountains; Patience is beautiful; God is with the Patient."<sup>6</sup> It is urged in the Qur'an in dozens of places such as the following:

Seek help in patience and in prayer.  
(II:45)

...and the patient in tribulation and adversity and time of stress. Such are they who are sincere. Such are the Godfearing.  
(II:177)

The Arab fondness for patience may be derived from their concept of fate, or kismet. Most Muslims believe in God's absolute

decree of every event, both good and evil, and patience is useful in this regard to wait for the inevitable.

Patience should not only be cultivated by Westerners assigned to the Middle East because it is respected by the Arabs, but it will be a great help in coping with cultural differences. Much of the time the egocentricity of the Arab family, the hyperbole of the language and the idealism of Islam will place cultural blocks in the way of our American systematic, direct approach. When all else fails, try patience.

#### SOME ADVICE TO US MILITARY ADVISORS FROM ARAB OFFICERS

The following is a summary of advice gathered by the author from Arab officers who have seriously worked with both US and Soviet advisors on how they would like to see foreign officers act in their countries.

1. Don't try to change our system. We have worked a long time to adopt it to our soldiers, and we understand them.
2. Don't saturate our military with your advisors; they begin to get in the way and cause resentment.
3. If you must give advice, do it to a group, such as in a class. If you try to treat us like children, it will belittle us in front of our men. If you deal directly with our men, we will lose face. Don't try to take over our soldiers; both they and we will resent it.
4. Don't try to maintain contact with us 24 hours a day. Sometimes we like to operate without supervision, and we do know how to run our unit.
5. Limit your mission to assistance, not interference.
6. If you must be critical, let us know first before you go to our commanders.
7. Try to arrange for our military students to go to your country rather than your building up a big training system in our country. There will be better results.
8. Don't question us about sensitive intelligence issues.

## NOTES

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28. John Bagot Glubb as quoted by Patai, p.192.
29. J. Milton Cowan, ed. A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic, (Ithaca: Spoken Languages Services, 1971), p. 822.
30. FBIS, 28 October 1980 and FBIS, 30 October 1980.

31. I. William Zartman, ed., Elites in the Middle East, (New York: Praeger, 1980), p.55., also Leonard Binder, In A Moment of Enthusiasm, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1978), pp.144-171 discusses this problem in Egypt.

32. Leonard Binder, "New Trends in Islamic Fundamentalism," Lecture, Brown University, Providence, R.I., 20 Oct 1980.

33. Ibid.

### Chapter III

1. The examples of Soviet involvement described in this text; some of which were handled ineptly--others not--were not all the result of the officers and diplomats on station. Some events were created by the decisions from Moscow and, to some degree, defined and carried out by those on scene. Although it is beyond the scope of this paper to explore the fuller implications of this factor, this kind of experience should be noted.

2. Mohammed Heikal, The Sphinx and the Commissar, (New York: Harper and Row, 1978), p.59.

3. Anouar Abdel Malek, Egypt: Military Society, (New York: Random House, 1968), p.103.

4. Jon D. Glassman, Arms for the Arabs (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1975), p.18.

5. Interview with CDR Gamal, op.cit., statements from Egyptian officers in general indicate that early opinion of the Soviet support was quite good.

6. Alvin Z. Rubinstein, Red Star on the Nile, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p.19.

7. Heikal, p.184.

8. Glassman, p.74.

9. Heikal, p.238.

10. The New York Times, "Summary of Sadat Talk on Soviet Ties," 19 July 1972, p.15.

11. The New York Times, "U.S. Officials Pleased at Sadat's Action," 20 July 1972, p.7.

12. Henry Kissinger, White House Years (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1979), p.1294.

13. Ibid., p.1296.

14. The Economist, "Egypt, Everybody Out," 2 September 1972, p.34.

15. Henry Tanner, "Sadat's Ouster of Russians Called Cool and Deliberate", The New York Times, 22 July 1972, p.1.
16. Harry B. Ellis, Soviet-Egyptian Friction, The Christian Science Monitor, 22 July 1972, p.2.
17. Glassman, p. 93.
18. Sadat, p.230.
19. Heikal, p.238.
20. Henry Tanner, "The Exodus Updated with a Soviet Cast," The New York Times, 23 July 1972, p.1E.
21. Heikal, p.243. This change in officer quality was also substantiated by several other sources and interviews.
22. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.
23. Heikal, p.283.
24. Ibid., p.283.
25. Sadat, p.230.
26. Walter Laqueur, "On the Soviet Departure from Egypt", Commentary, 8 December 1972, pp.55-56.
27. Ihsan Hijanzi, "Beirut Sources Assert Move Was Forced by Sadat's Officers," The New York Times, 21 July 1972, p.1.
28. Ibid., p.1.
29. Chaim Herzog, "Mideast: Soviet Exodus from Egypt," The New York Times, 20 September 1972, p.47.
30. Paul Wohl, "Soviet Tactlessness - How Big a Part in Egyptian Rift?" The Christian Science Monitor, 20 July 1972, p.2.
31. Interview with Cmdr Gamal, op.cit.
32. Hijazi, p.1.
33. William Beecher "Watch on the Suez," Army, November, 1971, p.11, quotes a well informed source in Cairo that the Russians had ten advisors in most battalions with two in the HQ and two in each of the four companies. Cmdr Gamal, op.cit., also stated that the Russian advisors on each patrol were permanently on board with the advisor living in a cabin adjacent to the CO's.
34. Interview with Trevor N. Dupuy, President of Historical Evaluation and Research Organization, Dunn Loring, Virginia, 15 May 1981.
35. The Economist, 2 September 1972, p.35.

36. Beecher, p.10.
37. Rubinstein, p.195.
38. Mohammed Heikal, Road to Ramadan, (New York: Quadrangle Books, 1975), p.160.
39. Glassman, pp.107-109.
40. Tanner, p.1.
41. Sadat, p.187.
42. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.
43. Ellis, p.2.
44. Personal observations of author while serving with UN forces.
45. Beecher, p.10, relates the well known story as well as Laqueur and others, including several Egyptian officers for whom this story "typified" their relationship with the Russians.
46. Heikal, The Sphinx and the Commissar, p.213.
47. Wohl, p.2.
48. The Christian Science Monitor, 17 October 1972, p.3.
49. Interview with Egyptian officer, Washington, 14 May 1981.
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52. Heikal, The Sphinx and the Commissar, p.279.
53. Rubinstein, p.22.

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14. Hurewitz, p. 127.
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16. Amos Perlmutter, Egypt The Praetorian State, (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Books, 1974), p.200.
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27. Hurewitz, pp. 242-252.
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29. Ibid., p. 6.
30. Nyrop, p. 319.
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